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ABSTRACT

This document outlines the 1992 proposals of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to gain public commitment and to assist state leaders in translating educational vision into reality. The first part examines the need for systemic educational reform, arguing that the key to systems change is a renewed democratic debate about public policy. The emerging consensus on educational objectives is described. The second part discusses the role of the ECS as a vehicle for systems change and outlines ECS vehicles for political and policy change and action priorities. Action will be organized around three major strategies: promoting systems change, transforming teaching and learning, and embracing diversity. The concluding section emphasizes that the call for renewed public dialogue involves reconnecting the public with its institutions and closing the communication gap between policy makers and the public. Active citizen participation, which creates commitment, is necessary for transforming American education. (LMI)

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RENEWING PUBLIC DIALOGUE

1992 EDUCATION AGENDA

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Education Commission of the States

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RENEWING PUBLIC DIALOGUE
1992 EDUCATION AGENDA

Education Commission of the States

Policy and Priorities Committee
William DeLauder, Chairman

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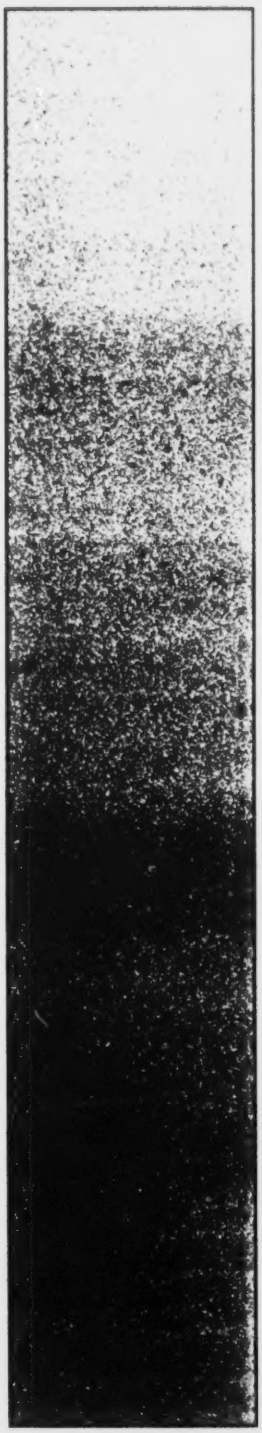


Preface

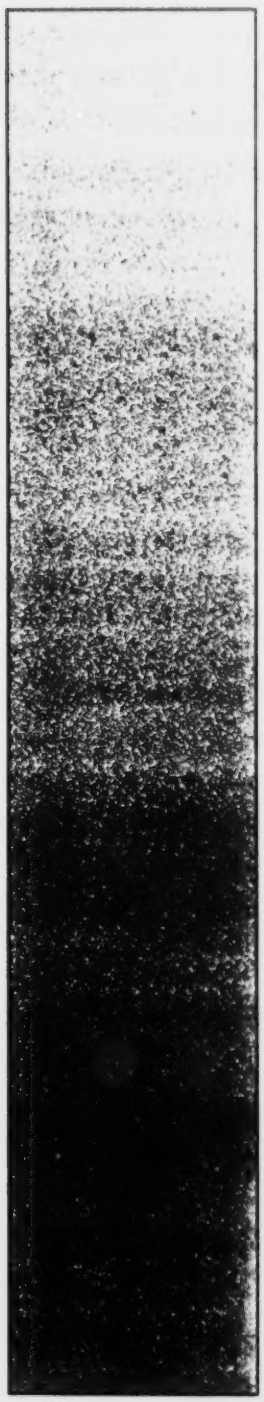
For the past several years, ECS has focused on the need to fundamentally change our education system to better educate students for life in the 21st century. As we have met with people throughout the country, we have found an increasing commitment to the need for improvement and a growing consensus about the principles that should guide our reform efforts. We have found agreement that we need **higher expectations** of all students and schools; a **vision** of an education system for the 21st century, not the 19th; and fundamental **restructuring of the education system**, not just individual schools and districts.

Our education system must do a much better job of educating students for a revitalized democracy and a world economy. Accomplishing this goal requires the support of literally everyone — parents, students, educators, policy makers, businesspeople and the public as a whole. To gain this necessary support, we must communicate to all citizens why we need a revamped education system and what such a system should be like. We must close the gap between what much of the public believes — that the education they had is good enough for today's students — and what the experts believe — that the United States will continue to fall behind if we do not educate our students for the increasing demands they will face as adults.

This will not be an easy task, but we are making encouraging progress. Across the country, citizens and policy makers are beginning to work together to define their vision of a new education system. A vision, arrived at through vigorous public dialogue on what our students should know and be able to do, is necessary to guide our actions now and in the future.

Because our constituency reaches into virtually every area of education policy making, ECS is well suited to help policy makers and citizens define their visions and move this agenda forward in the states. This *Education Agenda* outlines what ECS will do over the next year to gain the commitment of even more people and to assist state leaders in translating vision into reality. I hope you will join us in this endeavor.

William DeLauder
President, Delaware State College
Chairman, ECS Policy & Priorities Committee



Part I: Context for the Education Agenda

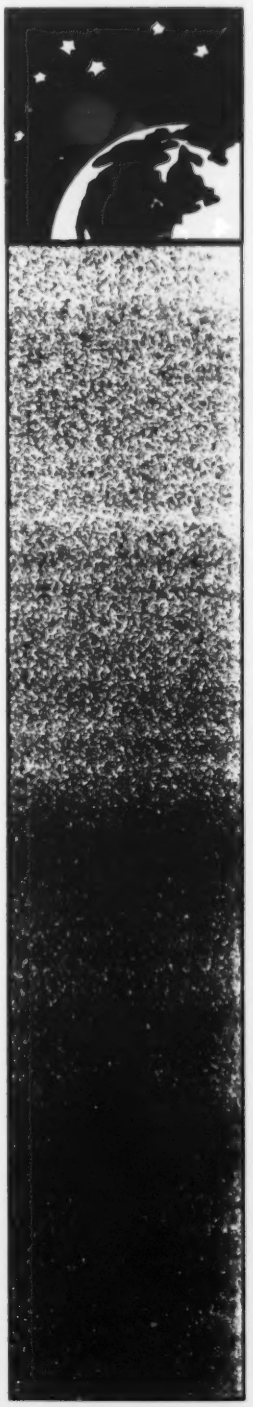
1992 — another election year. Much of the rhetoric sounds familiar. But there is something new in the air, something suggested by a word that crops up more often than ever in recent memory: the word "system." It usually appears with words like "fix," "redesign," "restructure" or "scrap" — the welfare system, the health care system, the foster care system, the banking system and, of course, the education system.

This frequent mention of systems represents more than a mere change in the vocabulary of political debaters. It represents a new stage in our thinking about social and economic problems and solutions. It is one thing to say that there is a problem with this or that bank or nursing home or school; it is another to say that the whole system of which each is a part — a whole institution, with all its operating assumptions, policies, politics and complex relations with other institutions — needs fundamental rethinking.

Many policy makers have arrived at this conclusion because their efforts to solve institutional problems one school or hospital or jail at a time have not worked. Model programs and pilot projects have not spread. Building-by-building, program-by-program reforms go just so far and stop. The problems don't go away. Often they get worse. Obviously, what people do in a particular school or bank or hospital is not just the outcome of their individual choices; their behavior is shaped by institutional incentives and disincentives, rules and regulations, professional norms and policies made far beyond the buildings in which they happen to work. If we want individuals to behave differently, we have to change all of these interrelated, non-individual influences.

Thinking about reform in this way is difficult, particularly when pressure on government to solve problems is more intense than ever. Policy makers are trying to stamp out one fire after another; who has time to look for underlying causes?

It is tempting under the circumstances to oversimplify problems, turn them into "sound bytes." It is tempting to continue describing "failure," placing blame, looking for "silver-bullet" solutions, rather than seeking to fundamentally transform the system in response to new demands. It is more natural to react to individuals and special-interest groups with narrowly defined agendas. It is hard to see beyond the



blinders of current committee structures and budget categories. Who has the energy to buck turf distinctions that have grown up around the old ways of defining institutional problems and solutions?

Who wants to stir up the kind of public debate it takes to redefine entrenched perspectives? Can we really expect people who are elected every two or four years to sponsor long-term, complex reform efforts that might not pay off until they are out of office?

All such concerns notwithstanding, there is a growing consensus that many of the nation's most serious problems are as much a consequence of systemic effects as of the actions of individuals, that previous efforts focusing on micro-level change yield disappointing results, and that we must find systemic approaches to changing our institutions, whether or not the task is politically or practically difficult.

From Here to There: Renewing Public Dialogue

Institutional systems are not abstract machines. They are people. Policy makers are inseparably caught up in these social systems, too. They cannot "bring about" systemic change from "outside" the system because the system is a creature of public policy. They cannot bring this change about by themselves or go through it without somehow changing the ways they do business. Systems change is not about changing other people. It is about changing ourselves.

To take a systemic approach to institutional change is first and foremost to get the people in and around the institution involved in redefining the purposes and meaning of the institution, considering how it contributes to the public good and arguing about how to make it better.

It may seem that the more traditional approach to public policy making — having experts define the problems and having elected representatives create the policies and governmental bureaucracies needed to implement the changes — is preferable to opening up a Pandora's box of public debate. But experts and politicians and bureaucrats and technocrats have not, by themselves, been able to solve our nation's most troubling problems. And over the 50 years or so during which we have increasingly deferred to the experts and formal representatives, citizen participation in public affairs has receded, fewer and fewer people have voted in elections, civic apathy has advanced hand-in-hand with a corrosive cynicism about politics and government. It is time to try a new approach — or, rather to go back to our oldest approach when civic energy has flagged:

> *The question is not what should government do — but how can it do it in ways that strengthen the initiative and participation of citizens, rather than reducing them to clients.*
>
> — Robert N. Bellah et al. *The Good Society*, 1991

widespread democratic discussion.

The key to systems change is a renewed democratic debate about public policy that:

- Brings fresh ideas and voices into policy making
- Reframes issues so they connect again with citizens' everyday concerns
- Creates alternative visions of where the community is headed and of what is possible
- Promotes a reconsideration of the values undergirding current policies
- Gives citizens renewed faith that they can be heard and can make a difference in policy making
- Creates new kinds of interactions between citizens and policy makers
- Focuses people on what is good for the community as a whole, not just for competing special-interest groups

To be sure, there has been no shortage of conversation about American education over the last decade. Governors and legislators in every state and even the president of the United States have voiced concerns and proposed ideas for change. Their work has raised awareness about the economic importance of education reform and led to considerable reform activity across the nation. Recently, though, a bipartisan consensus has emerged about some underlying values on which to base a new policy framework.

It is time to take those values on the road and let ordinary citizens critique, improve and expand upon them. At the same time, we need these citizens to understand and support a strategy for making the fundamental changes necessary in our schools.

An Emerging Consensus

What is the emerging consensus of experts and policy makers?

- The times require a much higher level of literacy than ever in history, for all citizens, not just an elite few.
- This "new literacy" includes capacities to think critically and creatively, to solve complex problems, to learn how to learn and other skills and knowledge that schools never have tried to develop in **all** students.
- In order to meet this new challenge, education will have to change fundamentally. Principles behind the changes include:
  - Schools must focus on learning.
  - All kids can learn far more than they are now.
  - Learning is an active, not a passive, experience.
  - Each student needs and deserves an advocate to help him or her learn to capacity.

> *This feeling of impotence [to affect public policy] appears widespread. . . . It is revealed, for instance, in a fervent belief among Americans that individual citizens can no longer have their voice heard on important public issues; that many, if not most, public issues are talked about by policy and opinion leaders, the media and others in ways that neither connect with the concerns of citizens nor make any sense to them . . .*
>
> — The Kettering Foundation, *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street America*, 1991

- New, more powerful forms of teaching and learning exist, but schools are using them only on a small scale.
- These new forms of teaching and learning require new forms of instruction, curricula, assessment and management; new forms of management require new forms of organization, new players and new relationships to the community.
- New forms of policy and politics are necessary to create the leadership and support for fundamental, large-scale change.
- We must put a premium on innovation — in classrooms, schools, districts, colleges, policy, politics.
- No single change will transform the system.

These ideas are powerful beginning points for public debate. Each can be questioned (Do we *really* mean *all* kids can learn? How can we get innovation and accountability at the same time?) Each point raises critical questions about what citizens value and how reformers should proceed. (Would a state or national examination system move us ahead or weigh us down? Who gets to decide what?)

Although changing the education system will take more than public discussion of education's purposes and meaning, the success of everything else depends on that discussion. Leaders will have to present compelling visions of what better schools and colleges are like and how a better system would function. Communities and campuses will have to raise expectations for students performance and establish new standards, curricula, assessments and/or teaching methods that go beyond traditional measures. State, campus and community leaders will need to develop long-range strategies for keeping reform going in tough times.

New coalitions must arise and take responsibility for aspects of change. Policy making must become more coordinated, less piece-meal, so that each year's policy agenda builds on prior progress. Policy changes in governance, finance and other areas will have to be related to one another and to the new visions and expectations arising from public debate. Higher education institutions will have to wrestle with their own quality issues and rethink teacher and administrator education pro-grams. State departments of education will have to move away from being monitoring bureaus to become technical assistance centers.

All of this and more will happen throughout the 1990s. But if it takes place in the absence of a democratic discussion about the values, substance and means to be used in reform — a conversation that alone can give it coherence and widely shared ownership — we will not meet the challenge that faces us.

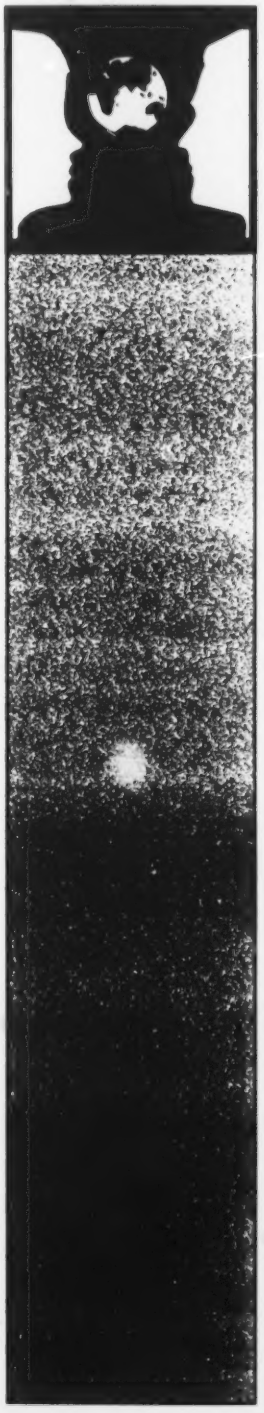
> *. . . the real crisis is our lack of confidence that we know how to come together and make decisions to solve our problems.*
>
> — Institute for the Arts of Democracy, *Building Citizen Democracy*, 1991

Part II:
ECS as a Vehicle for Systems Change

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is a natural vehicle for bringing about change throughout the education system. ECS consists of 371 commissioners, including governors, more than 120 state legislators (usually heads of House and Senate education committees), state and local school board members, chief state school officers, state higher education executive officers, college presidents, superintendents, teachers and dozens of other prominent education leaders from all over the country. More than 4,000 policy makers and education leaders — including several U.S. senators, the U.S. secretary of education and the major Democratic contenders for the U. S. presidency — are ECS alumni.

Like anyone else, ECS policy makers can and should promote the renewed public dialogue their communities need. But they can do much more, as well, to promote systems change. Policy makers can influence the system by, for instance:

- **Changing direction** — Raising standards and graduation requirements and developing new assessments; creating 21st century goals such as Connecticut and Maine's "common cores" of learning and California's curriculum frameworks in science and math
- **Changing who makes decisions** — Encouraging site-based management and collaborative decision making, more participatory forms of governance, as in Chicago, Los Angeles and Denver
- **Creating incentives for school and bureaucracy reorganization** —
  - Calling for "total quality management" and similar restructuring efforts, as in South Carolina
  - Creating leadership academies that stress new forms of management, as in California and Kentucky
  - Creating mechanisms for collaboration with youth-serving agencies, as in Texas
  - Restructuring state education departments and district bureaucracies away from compliance monitoring toward technical assistance, as in Virginia
  - Creating new mechanisms for greater family involvement, e.g., the Yale Child Study Center's School Development Project (James Comer)
  - Changing the collective bargaining process and orient-



ing it toward reform, as in Louisville, Kentucky

- **Changing certification and professional development** — Creating new standards for teachers, principals, administrators and board members
- **Changing higher education and its influences on K-12** — Improving undergraduate education; reforming teacher education; promoting school/college partnerships; revising admissions criteria to admit more students from alternative programs and restructuring schools
- **Changing how the money flows and how it is allocated**
  - Linking school finance formula to quality, as in Rhode Island
  - Providing funding for innovation and successful new models, as in Colorado and Washington
- **Changing quality and quantity of learning time** — Supporting ungraded schools, mixed-ability and mixed-age grouping, peer or outside tutoring, innovative programs such as Foxfire or Paideia; encouraging year-round schools, apprenticeships, tech prep
- **Promoting systemic reform models**, such as Re:Learning, National Science Foundation State Systemic Initiatives or district restructuring initiatives
- **Expanding options** — Creating more public school choice or magnet schools, such as the Illinois and North Carolina schools of science and mathematics
- **Getting out of the way** — Granting waivers or eliminating onerous regulations

ECS VEHICLES FOR POLITICAL AND POLICY CHANGE

- Constituent contacts:
  - Commissioners
  - Five Networks:
    - Advisory Commissioners
    - State Education Policy Seminars in 38 states
    - Governors' Education policy Advisers
    - Legislation Education Staff Network
- Programs and Projects
- National and Regional Meetings:
  - Steering Committee
  - National Forum and Annual Meeting
- Communications:
  - Clearinghouse
  - Publications
  - Media
  - Computer Databases

Doing all of the above will require a comprehensive strategy that includes:

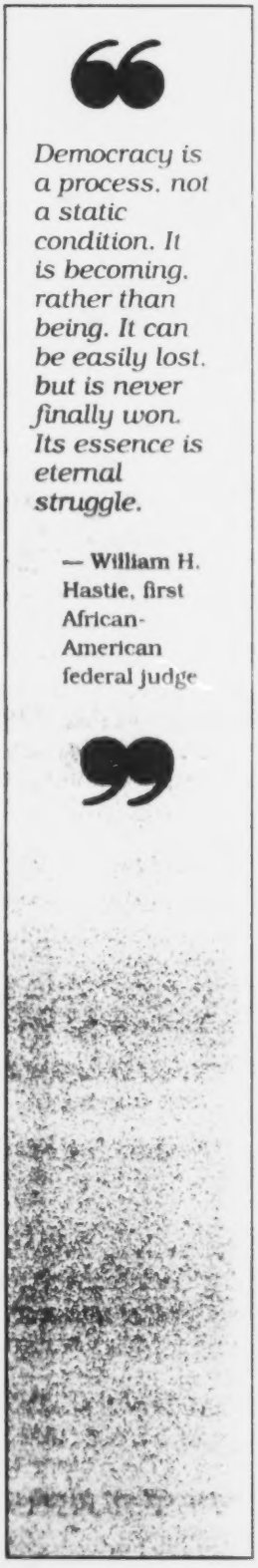
- A long-term coordinating coalition
- A communications plan for vigorous public discussion
- A process for creating new visions, higher expectations
- Benchmarks and standards for students, schools, districts, policy makers
- An audit of current policies
- An analysis of political realities and best strategies

Parents, teachers, taxpayers and community leaders are ultimately going to have to take responsibility for the hard, day-to-day work of improving education. If they do not help raise the key questions, shape the way problems and actions are defined or interact with experts and policy makers, they will be shirking the responsibility to reform education systems for the long term.

ECS PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

ECS is committed to a sustained, multi-year action agenda that focuses effort on fundamental *systems change* in American education such as sketched above. During the coming year, that agenda will be informed by what we and our colleagues have learned. Further, it will be shaped by our continuing deliberation about questions such as:

- How should education in and for American democracy be different from education as currently defined and practiced?
- How can we foster a new *education ethic* in America — a far stronger and more personal recognition that education is the cornerstone of economic well-being, civic vitality and quality of life?
- How can we engage communities far more effectively in the conversation and in decision making about education reform? In those conversations, how can we move from an emphasis on failures and deficiencies to a far more powerful and forward-looking vision of education?
- How can we mobilize public opinion around the *need for* change in education and the *nature of* necessary changes at all levels of the system?
- How can we encourage people to see policy making less as a process based on tallies of public opinion and more as a process based on the development and debate of public ideas?
- How might we strengthen the role of higher education in moral and civic leadership?
- How can we ensure that American schools and colleges are places where students learn *and practice* the "democratic arts" — not just the "civics" we learned in school, but the arts of active listening, self-expression, public dialogue,



Democracy is a process, not a static condition. It is becoming, rather than being. It can be easily lost, but is never finally won. Its essence is eternal struggle.

— William H. Hastie, first African-American federal judge

creative controversy, reflection, evaluation and judgment?

- How can we embrace both diversity and controversy as essential to the health and vitality of public life?

And finally, people at work on education reform are asking, "How can we create appropriate policy for a time of transition?" Pundits have observed that the challenge of systemic education reform is like trying to change the tires on a moving vehicle. Absent the luxury of closing down the education system while we redesign it, how can we make policy that keeps us moving in the right direction, that allows — even pushes — us to innovate, to learn, to continuously sharpen our vision and improve our methods for achieving it?

With these concerns in mind, ECS will organize its work around three major strategies:

- **Promoting systems change**
- **Transforming teaching and learning**
- **Embracing diversity**

Promoting Systems Change

The achievement of new and far higher expectations for **all** students will require significant, sustained commitment across the education system. ECS's work will be focused on these efforts:

- Communicate broadly the important strategies and steps requisite to fundamental, systemic change in education
- In selected states, assist leaders in assessing the status, designing coherent strategies and policies for restructuring their education systems and sustaining change over the long term
- Build capacity for comprehensive system restructuring by convening state leadership groups, offering seminars and workshops and providing resource materials
- Develop financial models that illustrate how states, districts, schools and postsecondary institutions can reallocate resources to fund systems change; assist educational and political leaders in their efforts to rethink roles and responsibilities across the system and to redesign governance structures to support reform
- Promote, nationally and within states, communication strategies that effectively mobilize students, parents, educators and the public in design and support of fundamental systems change
- Strengthen approaches for periodically assessing the progress of *systems* change; help states analyze and monitor their own efforts in K-12 and higher education reform
- Develop and sustain effective networks to support these efforts, involving na-

> *When we seek a new vision, we have to come to terms with a great paradox: If the new vision seems comfortable at first, it probably isn't right. If it feels comfortable and recognizable right away, it is probably a rehash of dated dreams and noxious nostalgia — not a new vision.*
>
> — Peter C. Goldmark, Jr., "All Aboard the Fin de Siecle Express," *Stanford Business School Magazine*, September 1991

tional reform leaders, education associations, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, business organizations, the philanthropic community, ECS advisory commissioners and others

Transforming Teaching and Learning

Author Peter Kropotkin's advice to students in the last century is still good advice: *"Think about the kind of world you want to live and work in. What do you need to build that world? Demand that your teachers teach you that."*

In our work to promote systems change, ECS recognizes that change in education must not be "substance-free" — that students must be the constant focus and that the driving purpose of reform is to facilitate and strengthen teaching and learning. Thus, ECS will:

- Help to create a clearer, richer, more focused vision of the desired outcomes of education; similarly, delineate the characteristics of restructuring classrooms, schools, districts, state education agencies, colleges and systems of higher education
- Support initiatives to reshape curricula, emphasizing higher expectations for all students; forge connections among initiatives for curriculum reform and those aimed at school restructuring and systems change
- Promote integration of community service and the "democratic arts" — active listening, self-expression, public dialogue, creative controversy, reflection, evaluation, judgment — in learning experiences for students
- Define the conditions that promote innovation and excellence in teaching and learning; delineate policy options that nurture those conditions and promote constructive change
- Promote development of policy to support alternative new forms of student and institutional assessment
- Support initiatives to redesign both teacher education and professional development; delineate policies that strengthen preparation of a teaching force for restructured schools
- Facilitate efforts to strengthen connections among the K-12 system, community colleges, baccalaureate colleges and universities; foster collaboration among education and other agencies to support community problem solving and improved service to children and youth

> *Policy making should be more than and different from the discovery of what people want; it should entail the creation of context in which people can critically evaluate and revise what they believe.*
>
> — Robert Reich, *The Power of Public Ideas*, 1987

Embracing Diversity

Our educational institutions, communities and nation can truly thrive only if we embrace diversity, make children our priority and tackle the issues of poverty, discrimination and marginality in our society. ECS is committed to these priorities:

- Contribute to development of a critical mass of women, people of color and people with disabilities in leadership and teaching roles across the education system — preschool to graduate and professional education, schoolhouse to statehouse
- Build the capacity of state and institutional leaders to improve minority student participation and achievement
- Identify and promote changes in policy and practice that will lead to *all students* learning at much higher levels. Emphasize policy and action to reduce fragmentation in policy making to better serve children and families; to promote equity in education finance; to address issues unique to urban education; to eliminate causes of preventable learning impairments; and to help students raise their goals and expectations
- Support mentoring programs that foster constructive relationships with students; promote service as integral to education for the democracy
- Promote efforts to ensure the participation and empowerment of *students* in efforts to restructure education
- Model organizationally the value of diversity and infuse its value in all aspects of ECS

Conclusion

This is clearly a time when circumstances demand a willingness to think in new ways, both about the substance of public policy and about the process of public policy making.

Evident across the country is a shift from prescriptive, top-down policy mandates to a view of policy as an enabling framework for action by communities, campuses and schools. From this viewpoint, the role of policy is not so much to direct people as to the details of what they must do and how they must do it; rather, policy serves to lay out the issues and the desired ends, to set standards for performance, to provide encouragement and support for constructive change, and to stipulate accountability for results.

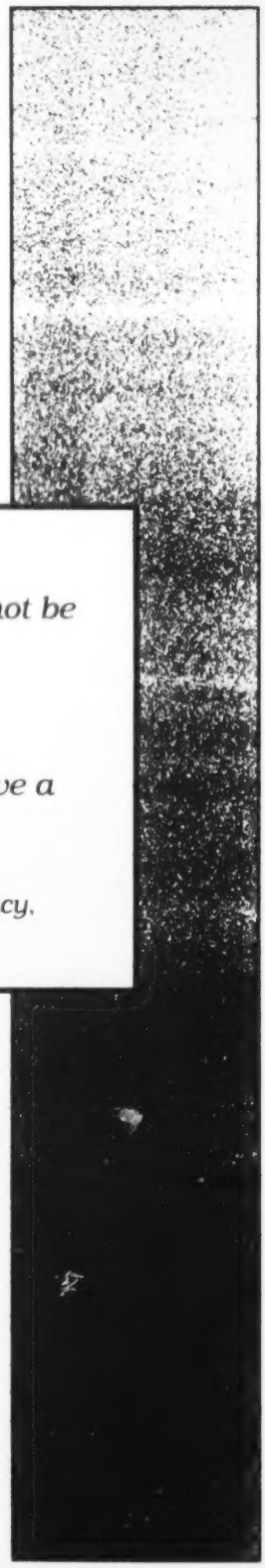
This *Education Agenda* calls for *renewed public dialogue* as crucial to the success of education reform. There already has been, our constituents remind us, plenty of talk. But only recently has the talk shifted to systems

> *We start by defining our children . . . in a very personal way, acknowledging them as* **our children**, *our resource. The reason for redefining* **those children** *as* **our children** *is . . . to help us redefine ourselves as a community of people whose futures are inextricably linked.*
>
> — Patricia Gandara, "'Those' Children are Ours: Moving Toward Community," *Journal of the NEA*, January 1989

reform; and too often, key stakeholders have been excluded from the conversation. The issue before us is not just *what* must be done and *how* to do it, but *with whom* the work is to be undertaken.

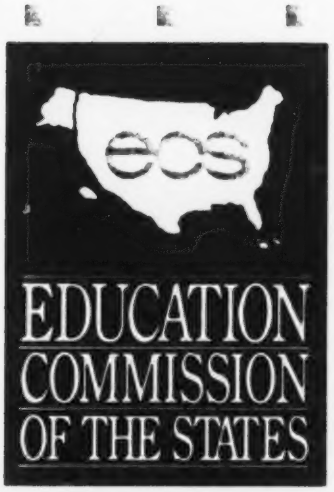
Thus, the call for renewed public dialogue is not about "just more talk." It's about reconnecting the public to its institutions. It's about closing the communication gap between policy makers and education "experts" and the public they serve. It's about mobilizing public support for the needed transformation in American education.

As we press forward with this challenging *Agenda*, we recognize again and again the truth and the crucial importance of these concluding words:



"Without the active participation of citizens, the unprecedented problems of the 21st century simply cannot be met. Solutions depend on the insights that emerge from diverse perspectives and experience. They require the ingenuity of those most affected. And they rely on the commitment that comes only when people know they have a real stake in the outcome."

— Institute for the Arts of Democracy, *Building Citizen Democracy*, 1991



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